

NEW
SERIES

MARCH

VOL.
33

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
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All the Year Round

a
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

PART 184.

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1834.

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 That we must work by crime to punish crime,
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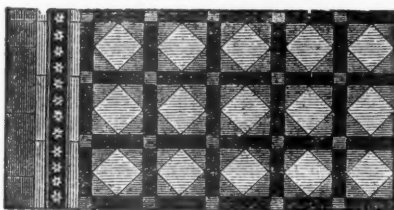
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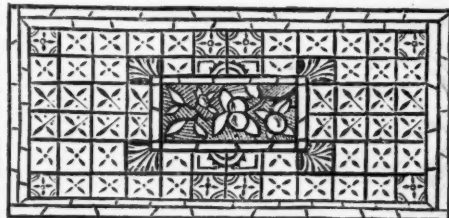


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SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1884.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

A DRAWN GAME.

BY BASIL.

AUTHOR OF "LOVE THE DEBT," ETC.

CHAPTER XXI. A SUBJECT FROM "THE TATLER."

DICK had the fortitude to adhere to his engagement to escort Ida and his aunt to the opening of the Woolstenholme Exhibition, though there was nothing now to be gained therefrom but weariness to the flesh and spirit. However, he was sustained in his heroic resolution by his pride in the beauty of his betrothed. As for Ida, she looked forward still to the affair, but now only as a distraction from the trouble of her thoughts.

Therefore, on the opening day, the three left Kingsford early to catch at Rye-cote a special train for Woolstenholme. At Rye-cote they found the special drawn up at the platform, but waiting still for a train from Elstree due in ten minutes. These ten minutes Mrs. Tuck preferred to spend in the carriage, and Dick on the platform with Ida, whom Mrs. Tuck with a pleasant peremptoriness bade accompany him.

As they walked up and down together, Dick was struck by the engine of the special, which was not only brand-new, but of a brand-new type. While he stopped for a moment to look at it, he was confounded to see the stately Ida step forward to shake hands with the driver! It was, of course, Archie, dressed, not unbecomingly, in cricketering-flannels. He, too, was going to the opening of the exhibition, and was allowed by the locomotive superintendent, on Ben's special recommendation, to witness from the footplate the wonderful performance of the new engine—which meant, practically, to share with Ben the honour of driving it. Thus it was that Archie came to be on the engine in cricket-

ing costume—his ordinary clothes, in which he meant to appear at the exhibition, being in the van.

But how came the undemonstrative Ida to step forward, hold her hand out, and exclaim with an impulsiveness truly extraordinary from her:

"Archie!"

In the first place, Archie, detected by his stately cousin riding his engine-driving hobby, was surprised into a sunny and humorous smile, which recalled to Ida irresistibly old days and associations; and in the second place, she felt at that moment—she knew not why or how—drawn towards Archie as towards the last and dearest link in that old life, from which she was being torn away so unwillingly and despairingly.

"Archie!"

"Ida! Are you going to the exhibition?"

"Well, I was; but then I didn't know you were going to drive."

"Oh, if that's all, I shall promise to keep my hands off the regulator and leave the business to Ben. You remember me telling you about my good old friend Ben? Here he is."

Ben, stepping to the running-plate, stooped and held his hand out Yorkshire-fashion, without the slightest sense of doing an odd thing, and Ida, equally unconscious of the singularity of the proceeding, put her little exquisitely gloved hand into the great sooty palm of the driver, whom she regarded as an old friend for his old kindness to Archie—Dick in mute amazement the while.

"Are ye middlin', miss?"

"I'm quite well, thank you."

"That's reet." Then, stepping on to the platform in his eagerness to set Ida right on a matter of momentous importance, he said

in a confidential and impressive tone, with an emphatic nod, and a chuck of his thumb over his shoulder in Archie's direction: "Tha hast no occasion to be flayed, miss; he mud drive t' Queen. He knows what be-longs to a engine amoast as weel as mysen," which, from a West Riding man, was equivalent to saying: "He's as nearly perfect an engine-driver as it is possible for mortal man to be."

Having thus set at rest Ida's dread disturbing doubts of Archie's capacity, Ben stepped back without another word to the footplate, and by turning the excess steam into the tender, put an end to the possibility of any further audible conversation. But indeed there was no time for more, for the Elstree train came in at this moment, and Ida, having again shaken hands with Archie, was hurried back by Dick to their carriage.

"That was my cousin," said Ida, as she took her seat.

"Which?" asked Dick with an amusing assumption of perplexity.

"They're so difficult to distinguish, I can hardly tell you," replied Ida, returning his smile.

"The one you shook hands with, or the one who shook hands with you?"

Dick's pride was of rather a flunkey kind, and he was not over pleased at the part which had just been played by his princess before a platform full of people.

"The one I shook hands with. He has a mania for engine-driving. It was Archie Guard, Mrs. Tuck."

"Oh, indeed," with exceeding dryness.

Mrs. Tuck believed, or, at least, believed that she believed, her poor dear husband's version of his relations with Mrs. John and Archie, and would not listen to Ida's glowing account of them. It was the only sore subject between herself and Ida, and came at last to be tacitly tabooed. Therefore there was nothing more said of this rencontre during the journey. All the same, they thought much about Archie—Ida especially—and were to think more about him before the day was done.

As it was to be a long day—since to suit Ida they were to stay for the concert in the evening—Dick insisted that they should take things easy, which, being interpreted, meant that with the exception of lunch and dinner, and many intervening refreshments, they were to do nothing. And truly Ida would not have seen much of the exhibition if she had not made use of the intervals in which Dick had to take the

narcotic of a cigar to deaden his sufferings. Then she would now and again leave Mrs. Tuck seated where all the dresses must pass her in review, and seek out such pictures as seemed from the catalogue of most promise.

She stood opposite one of these whose subject was described in the catalogue by an extract from the *Tatler*—poor Dick Steele's tender picture of his first introduction to death:

"The first sense of sorrow I ever knew was upon the death of my father, at which time I was not quite five years of age; but was rather amazed at what all the house meant, than possessed of a real understanding why nobody would play with us. I remember I went into the room where his body lay, and my mother sat weeping alone by it. I had my battledore in my hand, and fell a-beating the coffin, and calling papa; for, I know not how, I had some idea that he was locked up there."

The painter, diverging a little from his text, represented the child as arrested in the act of beating the coffin with his battledore by his mother's struggling through tears to explain to him what death, and a father's death, meant. The stealing dawn of awe and woe in the child's face was masterly done.

As Ida stood transfixed before this picture, the sorrow of her own childhood to its least circumstance rose up vividly before her. She travelled over again in thought every step of that via dolorosa till she stood by the grave-side in a thick darkness of desolation that might be felt. But out of that deepest darkness broke the dawn. She looked up from the grave-side into Mrs. John's face, as it had been the face of an angel, and heard again that voice which trembled like a tear as it sympathised with her.

By the grave-side, too, she saw Archie's bright, generous, boy's face, blushing as she thanked him for making it a garden. And then a quick blush suffused her own face at the remembrance of his kiss and hers, and her promise: "I shall always love you, Archie—always, and I shall marry you, if you want me, when you're a man."

"You've forgotten—" whispered Archie's voice in her ear.

She turned startled, and so suddenly as to arrest the remainder of the sentence. The pink flush in her face deepened to scarlet. For a second she was certain he was answering thoughts clear as speech to herself.

"I beg your pardon for startling you. I was going to say you've forgotten your catalogue."

Oh, bathos ineffable! Ida, rising to examine the picture more closely, had left her catalogue on a chair, whence a fierce old dame, thinking it meant as a retainer of a seat she coveted, had indignantly removed it to the floor. Archie, who had been watching and worshipping Ida for some time at a short distance, then stepped forward to take up the catalogue and return it to her.

"Worshipping her" we say, for, since they last met he had heard of Seville-Sutton's jilting her, and put at once his own generous construction on the story. Jilt Ida! If that automaton of a man was not engaged to her, most certainly she had refused him.

"You've forgotten your catalogue."

"Thank you," she replied, recovering herself with a great effort. "I had forgotten everything for the moment."

"You think the picture so good?"

"I'm no judge. It may be poor as a picture, but I like it as I like Home, Sweet Home, or Auld Lang Syne. The music may be poor, or poorly played, the charm is in the association."

"It is Auld Lang Syne," said Archie in a low voice of sympathy, seeing now the meaning and the memories the picture had for Ida.

"You've not forgotten?" she answered in a low, sweet, appealing tone.

The girl at the moment had a longing inexpressible that those old days and old relations might come back.

"I can never forget, but from an opposite reason to yours, Ida. They were the happiest days of my life."

"Yes; I remember Mrs. Pybus telling me you were always happiest in doing kindnesses. You might well have been happy then;" her lustrous eyes, aglow with more than gratitude, turned full upon him. This the girl he tried to scorn as the incarnation of a sordid pride!

Then with a sudden smile she said, to allow his escape from a mood whose seriousness he might find embarrassing:

"I've got all your presents still, except the white mice."

"And I, yours," in a low tone.

He was by no means anxious to escape from the serious mood.

"Mine! Why, I never gave you anything. I had never anything to give."

"Not this!" opening a locket, and showing a shining tress.

"Oh, that," with a burning blush. Then in a quick, confused, breathless tone, she was driven, she could not have told why, to add: "You adopted me, then, like Mrs. Pybus, and were more than a cousin to me—a brother to me, Archie, and are still?" with a pleading look. "And there's something I should like to tell you, as a brother, and that I should like you to tell Mrs. Pybus. Could we get into a less crowded room?" In truth, she was less anxious to escape the crowd than to gain a moment's reprieve from her miserable confession. "There; one can breathe more freely here," though she hardly seemed to find this relief. Then after a pause she plunged headlong in, as it were, with shut eyes and a shudder. "I wanted to tell you, and I wanted you to tell Mrs. Pybus, since she thinks it best I should not write to her—I wanted you to tell her, Archie, that I'm engaged."

Dead and dismal silence for a moment or two.

"To Mr. Seville-Sutton?" gasped Archie at last.

"Oh no," in a tone which would have convinced Mrs. Grundy that Ida had not been jilted by that gentleman. "To Captain Brabazon, Mrs. Tuck's nephew, whom you saw with me on the platform."

"Oh!" ruefully; and then after a pause, in a perfunctory voice, he added: "I hope you'll be happy, Ida."

"Thank you, Archie," as though she was acknowledging his promise to attend her funeral. She, of course, did not mean her voice to be as dismal as it sounded. Archie was distressed by its dismal ring? Well, no; we can't say he was. He found some cold comfort in it rather, with the selfishness of our sex. Again there fell a forlorn silence between them for a few seconds. Then Ida, as though to turn the subject, broached another bit of startling news. "You must tell Mrs. Pybus also, Archie, another piece of sensational news, if she has not seen it already in the paper. I had a narrow escape from being bitten by a mad dog a short time ago. It was making right at me when Captain Brabazon rushed between us, and got badly bitten on the arm, and had to burn out the part himself with a hot poker."

"Since you were engaged?"

"No, before," growing scarlet with the consciousness that she was meanly accounting for their engagement. She scorned

herself the more for this meanness because she felt that Archie saw through it. "He has shown himself noble in every way," she added, trying to patch the business up, "and he is a great deal too good for me."

"I suppose it's all settled?" with something like a groan.

"Yes."

"The time too?"

"It's to be soon."

"Not before you see mother, Ida. I think you ought to tell her of it yourself. Don't you think Mrs. Tuck might let you come to us for a week?"

"I'm afraid not. It isn't Mrs. Tuck, Archie. She would let me do anything. I cannot tell you how kind she has been to me always. But Mr. Tuck seems to be quite upset by the mere mention of your name, and she has him to consider."

"Ida, you must see mother before you do this."

You see, Archie spoke as though there was not the least question of Ida's heart being in the business; and, indeed, without intending it deliberately, she made this plain enough by her manner.

"There's no one I should so much like to see," she sighed wistfully.

"No one would so much like to see you. Ida, you ought to see her; you must see her."

"I don't know. If I can, but——"

At this point Dick appeared.

"I've been through all the rooms looking for you, Ida."

"I'm glad you've got through them all at last," she replied with rather an embarrassed smile. "Let me introduce you to my cousin. Mr. Guard—Captain Brabazon."

Dick honoured Archie with a supercilious bow and stare, and muttered something about his aunt wanting Ida.

"I shall see you again, I dare say, Archie, as we stay to the bitter end," shaking hands with him, nevertheless.

We are aware that there is much in the young lady's share of the foregoing conversation which seems to need explanation, or exculpation, even. She seems to show bad taste both in the time and manner of the disclosure to Archie of her engagement. She tells him of it apparently to prevent his making love to her, though he may not have had the least intention of the kind; yet in telling him of it she makes it pretty plain that she is heartwhole, so far as her betrothed is concerned. But, in truth, if Ida was safeguarding any heart by the

disclosure, it was her own. The picture, the host of associations it aroused, and Archie's treasury of the tress of her hair, had the curious antithetical effect of bringing her engagement to Dick, and all it involved, vividly and miserably before her mind, and by no effort at the moment could she have forced herself to appear happy in it. She had never felt so unhappy in it.

Accordingly, Dick, finding her absent and out of spirits, was inclined to jealousy of this detrimental cousin.

"Who is this engine-driving cousin?" he asked his aunt, when Ida had left them for a few minutes, ostensibly to look a little closer at some of the pictures; really, to indulge her own sad thoughts in peace.

"I don't know who he is, but I can tell you who he claims to be."

She then narrated to Dick Mr. Tuck's preposterous version of the affair, according to which Archie was a pretender put forward by the designing Mrs. Pybus. In her heart Mrs. Tuck did not really believe this absurd story, nor did Dick.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed with unusual energy. "Then, if he dies without a will, there'll be the deuce to pay. You never told me about this before."

"What was the good? My poor dear husband gets into such a state if any one talks of it."

"There'll be talk enough about it if he dies without a will; and the lawyers will bag every penny you have. It will be a very ugly business, I can tell you."

"He'll not make a will, Dick—not now."

"He'll make it fast enough if you tell him that, if he don't, all he's got will go to the lawyers."

Not a bad suggestion at all, thought Mrs. Tuck.

"Well, Dick, I'll see what he says."

"And the sooner you see to it the better. He can't go on taking medicine like that for ever."

For Dick, if he had had the writing of Mr. Tuck's epitaph, would have composed for him a similar one to that quoted by Pliny: "Turba se medicorum periise." For himself Dick considered that the sooner, under these circumstances, he secured Ida and her ten thousand pounds the better. Therefore the immediate effect upon him of his aunt's disclosure was the redoubling then and there of his attentions to Ida—an obsequiousness which, as we shall find, had unforeseen and unfortunate results for him.

For when Mrs. Tuck, wearied out, proposed to return home at once, foregoing the concert, and Ida, now in no mood to enjoy music, however celestial, at once assented, Dick, to the amazement of both, wouldn't hear of it. Ida hadn't so many chances of hearing good music that she could afford to lose this one. And that new singer, too, Madame Cambrie, or whatever her name was, that she was so anxious to hear, down for four things! His aunt was quite pleased with Dick's gallantry, and Ida grateful and remorseful. Why should she feel only gratitude for all this devotion, and feel even gratitude a burden? She took herself sorely to task for this bad and base spirit, and resolved to force herself into a more gracious acceptance of Dick's attentions. She did what she could to repay them at the moment by an attempt to spare him the concert. She assured him with perfect sincerity that she didn't care in the least for it, that she much preferred returning home at once. But Dick, having tasted for the first time of the sweets of martyrdom, was deaf to all dissuasion, and must manfully go through with it to the end.

Thus they stayed the concert out to the last bar, with, as we have above suggested, results which Dick did not take into account in reckoning up the cost of his martyrdom.

ABOUT SOME OLD MASTERS.

In the large gallery at Burlington House, and in that place of honour lately filled by Sir Frederick's Leighton's Phryne at Eleusis, hangs Reynolds's Mrs. Sheridan as St. Cecilia. It is one of the loveliest pictures ever painted by Sir Joshua, which is saying much; it is one of the best and most original in the present exhibition of Old Masters, which is saying infinitely more. In point of charm and simple beauty it is better than anything in the collection at the Grosvenor Gallery; better even than the delightful Child with a Mouse, or than Miss Cholmondeley, that charming presentment of a little girl carrying a dog across a brook. The original of this St. Cecilia was the once celebrated actress and singer, Elizabeth Linley, a daughter of the musical composer. She married Sheridan in 1772. Reynolds has painted her seated on a low stool playing an organ, with a beautiful simplicity of pose, a grace of gesture, and a sweetness of expression, such as even he has rarely if

ever surpassed. She wears a white dress, draped about her with the simple and consummate elegance which appears peculiar only to the art of classic times—the art of Greece, of Raphael, and of a brief period of the eighteenth century. The background, like the general tone of the picture, is a soft warm grey, half-brown, half-silver; suggestive and dreamy as the sound of singing heard across the sea. Cecilia, pressing the keys with dainty and loving fingers, listens to the sound she charms from the flutes of her organ, whilst two little child-angels nestle to her side, and, rapt in a lovely delight, lift their voices in a song of adoration. Seldom has the effect of music been suggested by line and colour with such supreme success. Raphael painted a St. Cecilia, and to see it is to imagine in a dim and mundane way some ineffable music of Paradise; Millet painted The Angelus, and to see it is to feel the unconscious epic of peasant existence, the pathetic calm and beauty of twilight, and the soft persuasion of the bell ringing the world to prayer. Reynolds's picture, and the sentiment it expresses, is, as it were, poised between these two; having something in common with both, and something that neither possesses. Raphael's saint dreaming of heaven, is divine; Millet's peasants, so devout and simple, are deeply and touchingly human. Reynolds's beautiful girl, and the singing babes beside her, are human too, in a different sphere; but the impression they create is akin to that with which we are filled by the celestial purity of Raphael's masterpiece. The impression is much weaker, it is true, and less noble perhaps; but it is not less lovely. Reynolds, living in a society distinguished by singular grace and amenity, studied it and painted it through the medium of the Old Masters, and the result is as obvious in this picture as in any other from the same hand. In a great measure the peculiar charm of it is distinctive of Reynolds and the eighteenth century. But his imagination worked in constant reference to the ancient kings of art—to Michael Angelo, and Raffaele, Correggio, and Titian. And so it would seem that in painting this portrait with poetical surroundings and significance, he must have had in his mind the noble charm of the work of him of Urbino—possibly that same St. Cecilia we have spoken of. And as for the children, those lovely, earnest little singers, with their angel-wings and innocent eyes, do they not remind us of

the wondering cherubs at the foot of the San Sisto Madonna? Surely, yes. And it is notable that, slightly painted as they are, they take no lowly rank in such trying comparison as this. Reynolds, as all the world well knows, excelled in the portrayal of children, and these in the St. Cecilia are amongst the sweetest he ever did. It is not too much to name them in the same breath with the little ones of Van Dyck, and the babes—divine and human—of the princely host of painters of Italian Renaissance.

And, its commanding beauty apart, this picture is historically very interesting. Reynolds himself prized it more, perhaps, than any other he produced. In the letter to Sheridan, in which he offered to the wit and dramatist the portrait of his wife for less than half its value, Reynolds wrote: "It is with great regret that I part with the best picture that I ever painted." It was painted in 1775, three years after Sheridan had run away with his lovely bride, and about the time that *The Rivals* was produced at Covent Garden; but it did not leave Sir Joshua's possession until fifteen years afterwards—that is to say, it remained with the artist until Sheridan found himself in a position to pay for it. The little angels—it is worth noting, also—are portraits of the children of Sir Joshua's good friend Coote.

In this same Third Gallery are several examples of Romney, of whom Reynolds appears to have cherished a profound dislike, and who at one time was a considerable rival, socially speaking, of the first president of the Royal Academy. There is a Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante, but not of much artistic account; there are two other canvases which illustrate Romney, in the one case, at his very worst and silliest, in the other, at his very best. The first picture in the Third Gallery is Flaxman Modelling the Bust of Hayley; it is not merely one of the most preposterous absurdities Romney ever produced—and he produced a good many—but one of the worst things ever seen on the walls of the Academy. Hayley—a mild poetaster, only remembered now as the author of a pretentious biography of the painter—stands full length, in an attitude which is meant to be heroic, but is merely affected and inept. Behind him a feeble person dabs at a shapeless mass of clay, after the manner of one who is indeed a raw apprentice to the business, and beset with vast doubts about everything, particularly himself. And yet this vague dabbler,

this wooden cipher of imbecility, stands for Flaxman, the greatest sculptor this country has ever produced, the supreme artist who drew from the stones of Greece the spirit of Greek design—the grandeur of its line, the beauty of its imagination—and impressed it upon his own work, so that almost everything he did is masterly. Odd, is it not, that "the man in Cavendish Square," as Reynolds called him, should treat genius thus? And yet Romney was a good friend to Flaxman, and the sculptor who could carve better than the painter could paint has said of him: "I always remember his notice of my boyish years and productions with gratitude; his original and striking conversation, his masterly, grand, and striking compositions are continually before me, and I still feel the benefits of his acquaintance and recommendations." A tribute as honourable as it was hearty.

Let us turn, however, to Mrs. Jordan as Peggy in *The Country Girl*. Here Romney is indeed at his best. Nothing of Romney's exhibited in recent years—and a good many of his pictures have been shown of late—equals it in pictorial and technical qualities, nothing so pleasant and harmonious in colour, so broad and expressive as to handling, so simple and yet so complete as to design. Mrs. Jordan was a singularly fascinating and lovely woman; her expression here is charming, and her gesture is caught and fixed with a spontaneity and liveliness not often equalled and rarely surpassed. Indeed, we shall not feel in the least surprised if many people are inclined to appreciate its laughing cheerfulness and healthy grace better even than the more pensive charm of Reynolds's St. Cecilia. Mrs. Jordan (Dorothy Bland) was born at Waterford in 1762, and made her first appearance on the stage in Dublin at the tender age of fifteen. She afterwards came to London, and performed at Drury Lane in 1785. She was also painted by Lawrence, whose picture may be remembered by those of our older readers who saw it at the International Exhibition of 1868. Romney's delightful work, if we are not mistaken, was engraved by John Ogborne in 1788, and prints are worth having. Probably no prettier Peggy has been seen before or since.

In this wonderful Third Gallery is a gigantic masterpiece by Rubens—*The Glorification of a Prince of Orange*, lent by the Earl of Jersey. This large octagonal work presents (according to the catalogue)

an apotheosis of Frederick Henry, third son of William the Silent, and grandfather of our own William the Third. It is, of course, an allegory, and of much the same order as the mighty achievements from the same hand which glorify the Louvre. The Prince, to all appearances perfectly daft with excess of ecstasy, is lifted by Minerva to a shrine amongst the clouds; Envy—a sort of desperate serpentine horror—clutching at him in an agony, is repelled by that magnificent creature, Truth; and beneath, and galloping through space in a fierce friskiness born of unadulterated joy, is a lion; whilst around are grouped various chubby Cupids, and Graces who, notwithstanding a decidedly Flemish development of form and feature, are very gorgeous and alluring beings indeed. On the whole, therefore, the apparent lunacy of Frederick Henry is not in the least surprising; indeed, his imbecile expression amounts to a master-touch of truth. If *ALL THE YEAR ROUND* were purely an artistic periodical we might say much of the technical splendours of this remarkable work; but writing as we do for each and all, it must suffice to say that in every technical quality it is simply magisterial and splendid. The power, the versatility, the invention and resource, the daring of Rubens are here displayed in a manner most impressive.

Let us go back now to the Second Gallery, and look at the landscapes of Rubens—best of them *The Farm at Laeken*, lent by the Queen—and the very vigorous and striking *Lioness and the Wild Boar* by *Snyders*, friend and collaborateur of Rubens, and mighty painter of animals into the bargain. In this room are three Rembrandts and a Ferdinand Bol. The mellow *Portrait of a Lady*, by Rembrandt (106), from *Lansdowne House*, has attracted much attention from the critics, and it is undoubtedly a fine example of one style of the master. Still, we prefer the rich and powerful *Portrait of a Young Man* (119), which shows this king of painters at his best. This should be compared with the *Head of a Young Man* (113), by Ferdinand Bol. Bol was perhaps in some respects the most successful of Rembrandt's pupils, and here the master's influence is strong indeed. But there is great individuality also; and if in point of warm imaginative colour this is scarcely as beautiful as the *Head of a Girl* of last winter's exhibition, it is nevertheless a remarkably fine example of the artist's achievement. There are two Van Dycks—a Charles the First and a

Queen Henrietta—but they are not first-rate specimens. Far more representative are a couple of very fine portraits by Franz Hals, hanging in the Second Gallery on either side of a large, glorious, golden landscape by Albert Cuyp. Everybody must appreciate the vigour and vitality of these heads; the eyes look at us as in life, and the noble swagger of the seventeenth century is set before us with dash and distinction, and a sort of heroic humour. Apropos of Van Dyck and Hals, we may repeat here a story which possibly has been heard or read before to-day, but is worth telling again. Van Dyck being in Haarlem, where Hals resided, called upon him to paint his portrait. Hals was dragged from some drinking-shop near by, but forthwith started the portrait, which he finished with a rapidity almost miraculous. But Van Dyck was not to be outdone—not he! He asked Hals to change places, observing significantly that “he thought he could do as good as that.” When Hals saw his visitor's work, he cried: “You are either Van Dyck or the devil!” He had recognised the master's touch. This story is told by Houbraken; if it is not true, it is certainly *ben trovato*, for it is entirely characteristic of Hals, who without doubt was a drunkard, and a wife-beater to boot. It is interesting to note that only of late years have his great merits as a portrait-painter been acknowledged. He was born in 1584, yet it is recorded that so late as 1745 a portrait of himself fetched only fifty-five florins, say four pounds five shillings, whilst in 1823 a Girl with a Kitten realised only thirty-five guineas. But we have changed all that, and lucky indeed would he be who should “pick up” a genuine Hals for such paltry sums as these. In these times to be a successful collector one must be a millionaire, unless one happens to be even as Professor Legros, gifted with a magic eye for unsuspected genuine old masters, and possessed of consummate knowledge withal.

The exhibition is particularly strong in landscape. Indeed, students seldom enjoy such an opportunity of tracing the influence of one painter upon another—of the old schools on the new—as is afforded this year at Burlington House. To begin with, there is the influence of Claude Lorraine upon Richard Wilson, who, not unhappily, has been dubbed “the English Claude.” There are several excellent Wilsons; and there are two or three good Claudes, as

well as one supremely good. No. 57, The Lake of Nemi, is Wilson at his best; lovely, suggestive, touched with romantic mystery, and yet serenely classical after the manner of Claude. But Claude's masterpiece in the Third Gallery is, we take it, a more perfect and commanding work. It is numbered 167, and entitled Philip Baptising the Eunuch; but it goes without saying that the incident of the baptism is an entirely secondary matter, alike in the painter's intention, and the spectator's mind. St. Philip, and the Eunuch, and the chariot with its heroic horses, are as nothing to the lovely landscape in which they are set. In gradations which one feels rather than perceives, the land melts away to where the "quiet coloured end of evening smiles"; on the left is a glimpse of the illimitable sea; on the right the soft and noble contours of the "everlasting hills"; and in the foreground Claude's own quiet pool, and tall trees dreaming in the evening air. The perfect balance of form and composition; the unity of effect, and the completeness and supreme elegance with which it is rendered; the depth and charm of the sentiment—these combine to make it one of the finest examples of the master that has been seen for many a day. From such achievements as this Wilson learned to gather what is best in his work; such triumphs as this Crome and Constable respected and admired, and Corot loved faithfully to the end.

The mention of Constable and Crome reminds us that each is represented this year by a single canvas. Constable's Sketch for the Picture of Salisbury Cathedral (9) is almost the first thing to attract the visitor's eye in the First Gallery. The tall and delicate spire is vignettied between over-arching trees, behind it a sky of spacious blue, broken by one sailing cloud, shining white and full in the sunlight. It is more properly a "study" rather than a sketch; and it is particularly interesting in that it proves that Constable, the painter of the broad brush, the master of swift effects—the artist who with seven strokes sets before you the "White Horse," harness and all; and in as many more gives you a summer shower, with its airy mingling of shadow, and shine, and dew—could be very, very careful when he felt that care was necessary. The cathedral here is painted with an affectionate regard for detail which should please a pre-Raphaelite and win the admiration even of Mr. Ruskin.

The Landscape, by John Crome (13), is close by Constable's fresh and delightful study; and it offers interesting contrast. Its method is not less broad, but its manner is altogether quieter. But then, the time is sunset, when the air is still, the light warm and golden, and the shadows full and deep. We have a rustic bridge across a stream, and cattle standing dubious and drowsy in the quiet water under the trees, whilst a high tower—rather like a chimney-shaft, by the way—rises in the distance. The whole thing is wonderfully simple and complete, very fine in qualities of colour and tone; and full of light and air. In fact, it is one of the best things in the entire exhibition. And Crome was an apprentice to a house-painter!

It is no very easy matter, this chatting about the Old Masters. It is not possible altogether to repress enthusiasm. To do so would be correct, no doubt; but it would also be very dull. And yet if one grows honestly enthusiastic about this or that picture, one is sure to be nonplussed by those awful experts. We were inclined, for instance, to feel a great many noble things concerning the Portrait of Himself, ascribed to Andrea del Sarto. But we find the critics have been fighting about it as is their wont, with results disastrous to some of them, and bewildering to the public.

Two prominent writers boldly declare that Andrea's work is not visible on that canvas at all; the Fiend of Restoration having obliterated it with complete success. Another critic holds up the picture as a supreme example to the portrait-painters of our own time; which is rather severe satire, if it be true, as the Daily Telegraph puts it, that the restorer has "killed Andrea del Sarto."

It is clear, therefore, that in a case like this humble commentators had better be careful of their words. However, we confess to feeling considerable admiration for this remarkably disputed work; and, let us quickly add, we are not singular in our weakness, having, in fact, several redoubtable critics, and any number of amateurs, to support us therein. Indeed, we may safely remark that, restored or not restored, the picture is really a fine one, and stands out from the unquestioned masterpieces which surround it, with quite distinctive strength and charm. A genuine Andrea might be expected to do as much, and with excellent reason. Michael Angelo

once said to Raffaele—when the latter was at the pinnacle of his fame—"There is a little fellow in Florence who would bring the sweat to your brow were he engaged on works as great as yours." The little fellow in Florence was Andrea del Sarto; and master-works of his yet exist which show how very true was Angelo's criticism. When Angelo—who rather relished in his gloomy way the infliction of verbal stabs—made that remark to Raffaele, Andrea would be about twenty-five years old, and it was probably about that time that this portrait of himself, if really by himself, was painted. If it is anything like him, he was a very handsome genius, worthy, indeed, to mate the beautiful Lucrezia della Fede, his wife and model, whose fair face and stately figure appear again and again in his work. He loved her so that he neglected both his friends and his duty; and in the end his devotion wrecked his life, and warped his art. Andrea's love-story, in truth, is one of the saddest—as all who know their Brown-ing (who did not read Vasari for nothing) are aware. They called him Andrea the Faultless; but the compliment was not entirely justified. Had he been wiser in his love, that "little fellow in Florence" might have equalled Raffaele, and possibly have outshone him altogether; as it is, his work is wanting in feeling. He was ruined by a deathless passion for a woman who "had no soul."

The Italian pictures are numerous this year; but, on the whole, the Venetian school is not represented as well as usual. Some half-dozen portraits are notable, however, and one ascribed to Giorgione is very beautiful. It is a Portrait of a Lady—one of those lovely faces whose type is the peculiar possession of this master, and perhaps, too, not the least of the things that constitute his special charm. It is common to hear Titian described as the king of the great school of Venice; and in some sense the description is right. But it should never be forgotten that he would not have been the mighty leader he was if Giorgione had not shown the way, and died. Titian, indeed, only surpassed his pupil because he outlived him by over sixty years; and notwithstanding that advantage, some of our ablest authorities give the palm for colour to Giorgione. He became not merely the master of his fellow-pupils, but the master of his master; in fact, he led the whole Venetian school into that worship of colour which is their chief glory. He died at thirty-three, or there-

abouts; and the story runs that he was killed by the infidelity of the woman he loved. Is that she whose beauty so often arrests us with its spell in Giorgione's pictures, as in some measure it does in this Portrait of a Lady?—the woman whose presentment is a classic—the woman with the sunny brown hair, and lovely face quiet with a sweet and grave serenity, and eyes that softly speak. Was it she who killed him?

MIRAGE.

Hot lies the sand beneath the weary feet,
The skies are dazzling downward through the heat,

No breath of wind to stir the heavy air,
No fleck of cloud to break the cruel glare
Of the fierce sunshine, as the reeling brain
Strives to force on the failing strength, in vain.

Nay, for across the desert stretch it lies,
Gleaming and cool beneath the mocking skies,
The sparkling lake—almost the feverish gaze
Can see its ripples through the silvery haze;
Almost the straining ear can hear the plash,
As its light wavelets on the pebbles dash.

One desperate effort more, and then to lave,
Parched lip and burning forehead in the wave;
One desperate effort more, and at the brink
In agony of thankfulness to sink,
Where the great palm-trees by the waters stand,
And their cool shadows rest upon the sand.

Poor wretch! the treacherous vision lures him on,
Till, faith, and hope, and strength, and courage
gone,

He falls and perishes, and leaves to life,
This lesson—arm ye for the present strife,
On no sweet future build a futile faith,
Do for each hour thy best. So armed for Death.

MEDITATIONS IN A COUNTING-HOUSE.

COMMERCE is the most potent force operating in the relations of mankind. It has grown with civilisation, and is most powerful where civilisation is most advanced. And yet, strange to say, it has not always been regarded as a pursuit adapted to persons of education—in the sense in which we apply education to the "learned professions." In point of fact, members of the learned professions have been accustomed to rank themselves, and have by general accord been ranked, as not only superior to, but as of some fibre quite different from "persons engaged in business." And yet we think it would not be difficult to show that a wider range of faculties is brought into play in the higher walks of commerce and industry than in any single one of the professions. It is not worth while, however, to enter upon the comparison, because in our generation a considerable change has taken place in commerce, and in the manner of regarding it.

It is, for one thing, no longer regarded by those not engaged in it as a mere strife in which the most cunning is, as a rule, the most successful. Business and deception were once, to some people, it is no exaggeration to say, synonymous terms. The art of trading appeared to these the art of deluding—the art of making black appear white—the art of exchanging old lamps for new.

This delusion has vanished, and with it the reproach that used to be in certain circles attached to any "person in trade." The caste distinction has disappeared, and nowadays it is no uncommon thing to find scions of the nobility and landed classes condescending to be "something in the City." There is now, indeed, such a mixture of noble and burgher, that it cannot be said that we have any longer a distinctively "idle class." Idlers in all classes we shall always have, of course, but no longer a select breed whose sole privilege it is to "laze." The profits of landowning are so reduced, that almost every landowner is compelled to seek augmentation of income from some other source. Some of the holders of our oldest titles of nobility are among our largest manufacturers of iron, others are engaged in textile industries, several are extensive shipowners, and one at least in Scotland has lately turned shipbuilder. A still larger proportion finds employment in the management of public companies; and amongst the younger members of the same class, many are now to be found occupying stools in City counting-houses.

It is natural, perhaps, that such an innovation should not have been regarded with universal favour by the rising generation of the mercantile classes. The avenues of trade, these say, are already overcrowded, and we have no room for interlopers. But the avenues of commerce always have been, and always will be, crowded, and a man with a title has just as much right in the crowd as a man without one. The infusion of new, and if you like, bluer, blood is a distinct gain, we hold, and whether cause or not, it is certainly coincident with a marked improvement in the manners of business people. The present writer has been engaged in business from boyhood, and well remembers the heart-breaks which the brusque unceremonious modes of dealing twenty or thirty years ago used to occasion him, fresh from a gentle-mannered home-circle. Now he finds in all parts of the country,

courtesy in business transactions to be the rule rather than the exception. Boors there are still, of course, and none more objectionable than your so-called "self-made man," but they are in the minority. There are few large counting-houses in any one of our great cities where a gentleman's son may not enter with the assurance that he will mix with gentlemen.

We take leave to doubt, however, if the influence on the members of the upper circles who engage in trade is always a favourable one. We are inclined to think the effect in the first instance must be deteriorating. The youthful aristocrat who ventures into business, does so without the traditions or the inherited instincts of the mercantile scion. Although the first object of commerce is to make money, the sole enjoyment of commerce as a pursuit is not in the making of money. There is something a good deal higher than avarice in the thoughtful planning of affairs, and in the exercise of tact, energy, and skill in carrying them through. All the intellectual faculties are brought more or less into play, and the professor of commerce need not necessarily be any more mercenary in his thoughts and aims than the professor of chemistry who pursues his avocation for pecuniary reward. In the game of speculation a man must have the same qualities as a soldier in the game of war, and similarly in breasting the waves of a financial storm he requires all the coolness, and nerve, and fertility of resource of the perfect sailor.

And trade has its æsthetic aspects as well. To examine a good sample of some commodity may impart to the merchant; and to handle a piece of fine, or what the Americans call, "gilt-edged" paper (in other words a good bill), may impart to the banker a pleasure as genuine as that with which the bibliomaniac fondles a precious tome, or a chinamaniac gloats over an old teapot. Commerce, we repeat, is not all sordidity. Money may be its first, but it is not its last object, and there is more true and healthful enjoyment in the process of making than in the possessing.

Commerce, again, inculcates many high virtues. Industry, perseverance, and thrift at once suggest themselves, but besides these, fortitude under misfortune must be a leading characteristic of the perfect business-man. In an old book of travels in Morocco, which we came across lately, the author tells of a merchant of Fez who had had his caravans plundered by the

Arabs three several times and himself three times reduced to absolute poverty, but who murmured not at any one of the disasters, but set himself patiently and quietly to retrieve his fortunes. A man who cannot face losses and bad debts with equanimity makes but a poor merchant. This, however, is a matter of temperament and of experience in which the aristocrat may be on all-fours with the trader-born.

Where the latter has the advantage is in the traditions of his class. He has been brought up in an atmosphere impregnated with the hopes and fears, the successes and failures, of trade. "Shop" may or may not have been talked in his domestic circle, but he has acquired certain nebulous ideas founded on such casual remarks as the infallibility of A in judging cotton, or wheat, or something else; the shrewdness of B in forecasting markets; the smartness of C as a buyer, and of D as a salesman; the cleverness of E as a financier, and so on. These ideas may be nebulous, but they crystallise very rapidly when the lad enters into active business. And even in a state of nebula the young aristocrat has them not. He has a vague notion that "business" consists in sitting at a desk, alternately writing letters and adding up columns of figures in big books, varied with occasional excited rushing about a large room among a crowd of others doing the like. He goes into commerce without any innate conception of the higher qualities required in, and the nobler feelings engendered by, commerce. He enters it to make money, and he is disappointed to find the process not by any means so simple as he expected. He rarely rises above the mere sordidity of his profession, and thus its pursuit has a deteriorating effect upon him.

An unpleasant figure in the business-world of the day is the mercantile "masher." By him we mean the youth who at school and elsewhere has assumed the airs and graces of the class above him. When he enters his father's counting-house he puts on an amazing amount of "side," to the disgust of the old clerks and the ridicule of the young ones. There is always nowadays a tolerably large supply of the mercantile "masher," but his individual life, happily, is not a long one. He either moults his feathers and develops into an active, intelligent merchant, or he drops out of the ranks altogether.

Our remarks thus far have had reference to certain personal features in the commerce

of our day; but there are other features indicative of a change much more serious. The speculative element obtains now in all branches, has extended to departments where it was quite unknown in the writer's young days. Middlemen no longer content themselves with buying from A to sell to B. They probably sell to C, and D, and E, and all the rest of the alphabet, before they have bought a single fraction, and have taken the chance of buying cheaper when the time comes. This is what the Americans call "selling short," and what we call "bearing." It is a favourite saying on the Stock Exchange, that it is "the bear who makes the money," which being literally interpreted means that markets more often go down than up, which is obviously absurd. If the "bear" in the Stock Exchange, as a rule, makes money, it is not because markets have a partiality for him, but because he can exact a profit from those to whom he has sold who do not want what they have bought. They pay a fine, called a "contango," to the seller to postpone delivery, and an accumulation of those contangos forms the profit of the "bear." He can choose his own time to buy in what he has sold, so long as he has capital at command to pay his way against adverse movements in the markets.

With commodities it is different. There is no "contango," and the seller cannot choose his time for delivery. While he is eagerly selling, the market for what he is selling may be rising gradually against him, and yet he must buy in order to fulfil his contracts. It is a hit or miss style of doing business, which is much more common than is generally supposed. It is the result of keen competition, and it is fruitful of mischief. The advice which the elder Vanderbilt gave to his son, "Sonny, never sell what you haven't got," was sound and wise, and it is one of the worst commercial features of the day that it should be so extensively disregarded.

It may be argued that he who buys what he has not sold occupies an analogous position to him who has sold what he has not got. But there is no real analogy. It is the foundation of all legitimate commerce to first acquire that which you propose to sell. The life of a merchant of the old school was a continuous process of education in the art of buying—when to buy, where to buy, and what quantity to buy. And these old-school merchants accurately gauged their outlets, so that

they knew that what they bought they could sell. Our modern trader who is not of a "bearish" turn of mind, is usually possessed with the idea that the particular commodities in which he is interested will "go up." He buys, therefore, not in proportion to the absorbing capacity of his connection, but as much as he can finance, and often more. That is to say, he does not buy for his customers, but he buys "for the rise." He is caught just as often as his neighbour the "bear."

We do not condemn speculation in business. Speculation, indeed, is the soul of commerce. We regard it, however, as a most objectionable feature that the practices as well as the slang of the Stock Exchange should have been imported into mercantile transactions. It is not always easy to define what is legitimate and what is illegitimate speculation; but certainly that is illegitimate which seeks to override the operations of the law of supply and demand. To "sell short," not in anticipation of a fall, but in order to make a fall; to buy, not in anticipation of a rise, but to form a "corner," and force a scarcity, are distinctly improper and vicious practices. Yet they are becoming almost as familiar with us as they are in America.

In speaking of the Stock Exchange we do not wish to decry that important and most useful institution. It represents a distinct and indispensable branch of commerce, but a branch which should always stand by itself. It has developed a species of trading suitable to its arena, but not suitable to other branches. We do not range ourselves among those who condemn wholesale the system on the Stock Exchange of buying and selling what is not intended either to be taken or delivered. The prices of stocks and shares are affected by a great variety of influences which have no effect on other commodities. It is the business of the dealer in them to forecast and gauge these influences, and to trade upon his knowledge and experience. He may, with perfect propriety, buy, not a certain stock, but the advance in price which he expects to see in that stock a fortnight hence, and if at the expiration of that time the advance has not come, there is nothing immoral in his postponing the operation for another fortnight, and so on. In other words, it is quite legitimate to buy or sell probabilities, provided the trader operates within his means, which proviso is applicable to every department of trade. But dealings of this kind require

a natural qualification and undivided attention. Therefore, operations on the Stock Exchange are not adapted to persons engaged in businesses which should engross all their attention, monopolise their energies, and employ all their available capital. It is hard to say whether the tendency has developed from the Stock Exchange outwards, or merges inwards as to a common centre of speculation, but in every department of trade there is now prevalent a disposition to dabble in stocks. Men who have neither the time nor the money to spare out of their own businesses rush off to make wild purchases or sales of shares about which they know little or nothing, and the movements in which they have neither the mental training nor the experience to understand. As a rule they lose at both ends—in their ill-advised speculations, and in weakened allegiance to their own special affairs. We hold, then, that it is illegitimate speculation in which anyone engages outside his own chosen walk.

It has been often said that the tendency of the time is to dispense with middlemen. To some extent this is true, and it is unfortunate both for the middlemen and for the principals. It is all very well to theorise about the advantages of bringing producer and consumer into immediate relation, but the practice is productive of much evil.

For one thing, it forces the middlemen into speculative operations which hurt everybody connected with them. For another, it stimulates over-trading on the part of the producer; and for a third, it restricts the range of choice of the consumer. The special training required to make a man a successful manufacturer does not qualify him to become a successful merchant. Perhaps, indeed, it may have a contrary effect, and, at any rate, the worry and anxiety and risks of distribution must be immensely greater to one who can only give a part of his attention to it, than to one who has been trained to it, and whose sole occupation it is. There is a disposition among economists to depreciate the distributor, but he is as necessary to the general welfare as the producer, and we have always the consolation of reflecting that the limitations of capital will always prevent his utter extermination. The attempts to do without him so far have not been remarkably successful.

The practice of "making corners," that is, of buying up commodities in order to make an artificial scarcity, and therefore

an artificial enhancement of price, has not become so common with us as it unhappily is in America. The reason is, not that there is less inclination, but that there is less opportunity here for speculations of the kind. They are occasionally attempted, and we have never known a single one end successfully for the speculators. These last always seem to forget that what they are buying must be sold some day, and the more a price is artificially inflated, the more rapidly will it run down when the artificial support is withdrawn. We have noticed some efforts being made in the United States to make operations of this kind illegal. The evil, however, is one which will work its own cure. Adversity has a wonderful effect in checking vicious speculation.

It is a remarkable fact that in "dull times" the highways and byeways of commerce are always much sweeter and cleaner than in very lively times. When trade is quiet, people have more leisure to consider their actions and to pick their steps. Thus it is that financial crises act like thunderstorms in purifying the commercial atmosphere. Dull times are to the business man as the virtuous leisure of Opposition to the statesman.

TRAVELS IN THE EAST.

PART I.

BOOKS of Eastern travel have been plentiful enough, and many are the marvels which have therein been recorded. Volumes varying in their size as well as in their style have been as thick as autumn leaves that strew the brooks of Vallombrosa; which, a recent tourist states, is nowadays by no means so remarkable for leafiness as in Milton's time it may have been. Facts and fiction have been copiously mingled in these records, and they who may have smiled at the fables of Herodotus may have likewise been amused by the fancies of Eothen. From St. Paul to Captain Burnaby is rather a long step, but each of them has given some account of Eastern travelling, and writers who have helped to fill the gap between them have, in their turn, done something to enlighten Western ignorance of Oriental sights, and scenery, and life, and locomotion.

So that when I first thought of putting into print some record of my recent travels in the East, I confess I felt alarmed lest I might quite inadvertently be found committing plagiarism. Yet a second thought

convinced me that my fears were wholly groundless. For the fact is, I have never travelled farther East than Venice, and I have no thought of attempting to rival Mr. Ruskin, and to write about that city. The isles of Greece are only known to me in Byron, and, except in picture-galleries, I have never seen the Parthenon. Home-lover as I am, I have never gone to Egypt, much less to Jerusalem, whereof, apart from sacred lore, the only things I know are its artichokes and ponies.

But the country I have visited in my late travels in the East may be reached with no long flight by a home-bird such as I am. The strange scenes I have looked at lie no farther off than Stepney, and the most distant point I gained must certainly be placed within three miles of London Bridge, and may readily be reached by road, or rail, or river. In fact, the purpose of my journey was to make myself acquainted, in some degree at least, with the poor at the East End, and to gain a certain knowledge of their dwellings and their doings.

Being wholly new to the strange land I wished to see, I thought it prudent at the outset to engage a skilful guide, who should direct my progress. The conductor whom I had the good fortune to select was Mr. Walter Austin, who for years has been the manager of the London Cottage Mission. This gentleman has long been familiar with the country and the customs of its people, and, although as yet not famous in the Annals of the Geographical Society, he has certainly done wonders in the way of Eastern exploration. Some account of his good work there has been published in these pages,* and having seen how well he was able to conduct himself on the occasion there described, I felt sure of a safe guide, if he would personally conduct me in my course of Eastern travel.

Explorers who intend to visit a strange country provide themselves in general with a vast number of things which may be useful in emergencies, that somehow never happen, and so, when starting on my journey—on the morning, let me add, of the first Wednesday in February—I thought it only prudent to carry an umbrella, which, except a sandwich, was indeed my only baggage. I might have foreseen that the precaution would be quite needless, and, in fact, throughout the day it never rained a drop.

* ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, Vol. 33, p. 299, "One Dinner a Week."

Even the City streets were clean as I pushed my way along them from the station miscalled "Mansion House," the station being in Cannon Street, while the Mansion House is not. So on reaching Aldgate Pump, which, if memory serves me rightly, once was famous in a farce, I decided to take neither a hansom nor a tram, but to walk like Mr. Weston and such heroes of the footpath, along the couple of miles or so which led to Salmon Lane.

Here I arrived at noon, and found the usual little crowd of Wednesday diners-out. All had their spoons and plates, and doubtless, too, their appetites, quite ready for the feast which was about to put some colour into their pale cheeks. Above a hundred entered while I stood at the door, and though I kept a sharp look-out, I declare I only noticed one good pair of boots. Three tiny little trots had scarce a pair of soles between them, and many a Baby Barefoot might have been observed. One little Cinderella came in a fancy costume, which looked as though it had been made of an old counterpane of patch-work, and I wished that some good fairy could have seen her wretched slippers, which were certainly transparent, though they were not made of glass. Then possibly the fairy might have waved her magic wand and have presented the poor child with a good strong pair of shoes. Ah, ladies of the West, who have children of your own, whom you delight to see well clad, will you sometimes spare a thought for these poor children of the East? When you think Miss Lucy's cloak is beginning to look shabby, or that Master Tommy's jacket is just a bit too small for him, or his boots a trifle tight—for he is such a growing boy, and his appetite so hearty, bless him!—will you kindly make a parcel of the raiment you discard and send it to the Cottage Mission Hall in Salmon Lane? Thus, at no great cost or trouble, you may assume the part of the benevolent good fairy, and by your performance for their benefit, confer much real comfort on many a little Jack and Jill, and Sue, and Cinderella, who are now so poorly clothed.

My guide was ready for a start, soon after his small guests had sung their usual grace. We left the lady-helpers all busy at their work, and enveloped in a cloud of incense as it were to the deity of dining, arising from the big tureens of fragrant, steaming stew. Alas! our nostrils had been filled with odours far less savoury

when, after three hours' travelling, we next entered the hall. There was, however, a faint smell of something like to cookery in the first house that we visited; faint, that is, when compared with the fine savour we had sniffed while the stew was being served. Still, the smell was quite as strong as one could well expect, when one had traced it to its source, and found that it proceeded from so very small a pot. This was slowly simmering on a fire which for its smallness must have been made to match. Despite its littleness, however, it made a bright spot in the room, which otherwise was sadly dull and dismal to the eye, and brought to mind a vision of the blue chamber in Blue Beard, for the walls were of that colour, excepting in the places where the plaster had peeled off. There was no cloth on the table and no carpet on the floor, and but a scanty show of crockery on the shelf. Signs of comfort there were none, though there was certainly a cat, whose presence often seems to give a room a cosy look. But pussy in this case looked sorely thin and careworn, as though mice were rather scarce. Near the ceiling, which was less than eight feet from the floor, there hung a poor little canary, imprisoned in a cage so small that it could hardly hop. As, during my whole visit, he stood silent on his perch, and neither sang nor even chirped a single note, perhaps the inference is fair that his life was not more cheerful than that of the cat—not to mention the six other usual inmates of the room.

Curiosity is vulgar and may be offensive; but I could not help confessing that I felt a little curious as to what was in the pot. "Three penn'orth of meat, penn'orth of potatoes, ha'porth of pot-herbs, and a pinch or so of salt." That was in the pot with about a quart of water; and that was the dinner for mother and two children—Joey, a small boy of twelve, and Jim, a biggish one of four; her other two to-day being guests in Salmon Lane. Mother is a comely, bright-eyed, civil-speaking woman, "forty-two last birthday," she says without reluctance, and hardly smiles when told that she looks younger than her age. Fifth of November is her birthday, remembers it by Guy Fawkes. Father's forty-eight. Gone to the hospital he is, because he's got hurt in the back. His birthday was yesterday. Oh no, sir, 'tweren't like that. Father didn't have no birthday jollification. Bless you, he's too poor to spend his money in a spree. You see, he's a

dock-labourer, and, now work is short, there's such a crowding at the gates. That's how he got jammed. A strongish man he is, too, but not being overfed, you see, a small hurt tells on him. Wages? Well, he earns two-and-elevenpence a day, when he can get full work, but there isn't one day out of three he gets it. Yes, I know there's many as works half-time 'cause they likes to. But he's not one to shirk or laze about in that way. There ain't a drop of idle blood in all his body, that there ain't.

Mother looks a little fierce as she says this, and her bright eyes gleam defiance of attack upon the absent. I divert her wrath by pointing to the sad want of repair which is apparent in the premises, and her anger blazes out at the mean greed of the landlord, whom she holds to blame.

"He won't do nothing, bless you; not spend a penny, he won't. Yes, the plaster's off the walls, and the floor is half in holes, and the roof it lets the rain in. But it's no good our complaining. House-room's precious scarce, although you wouldn't think it to see the miles there is of 'em. Four shillings a week we pay for our two rooms (which, except a staircase, is all the house contains), and if we were to leave he'd easy find another tenant."

Might we see where they slept? Why, yes, we might, and welcome. Mother briskly leads the way upstairs, and I, as briskly following, get a blow from a low beam, which sets my brain reflecting that a sudden rise in life is not unfraught with danger. The bed-chamber, we find, is of the same size as the sitting-room—or, shall I say, the parlour? for there were not many chairs in it—the floor, say, ten feet square, with seven feet to the ceiling. There are a couple of beds, both covered with coarse sackcloth, and neither showing sign of either sheet or blanket. The parents sleep in one and their four children in the other; and for the purposes of toilet there is an old cracked looking-glass. The floor is bare, the walls are blue, the ceiling rain-discoloured; there is neither chair, nor table, nor clothes-closet, nor washing-stand. I presume there is a pump somewhere handy in the neighbourhood, but, as far as I can see, there is nothing in the house to serve the purpose of ablution.

Returning to the parlour—or, shall I say, the kitchen?—I remark upon the damp which stains the corner by the cupboard. The last tenant, it seems, had used this closet as a dog-kennel, and had

left it rather disagreeably over-populated and sorely needing disinfection. Assuming for the nonce the part of sanitary inspector, I go behind the house, and there I find a small enclosure, wherein, if one may judge from the filth which lies a-festering, any rubbish may be shot, and no count be taken of the shooting. A heap of this lay piled against the wall whose dampness I had noticed, and I proclaim my opinion that the vestry ought to see to it. "They won't do nothing," says mother; "not if you goes on your knees to 'em. Why, yes, it do smell bad at times, but there, it's no use our complaining. The landlord 'ud soon turn us out if he caught us a-grumbling. How long has it been wet? Well, mostly since last winter. Ah yes, Mr. Austin, when I think how those three children were all took away so sudden, one after another, somehow it's my belief the dampness might ha' done it. Yes, sir, they all died in a fortnight; leastways, in fifteen days they did. Oh no, sir, they wasn't the last tenant's [for she had told the tale so calmly that I put the question]. My own children they was, now weren't they, Mr. Austin? An' they all died last April. An' a jolly good cry I had when they was took. An' I've had many a cry since. But there, crying ain't no good. Poor little souls, maybe they're happy now they're dead, an' whiles they lived I know they hadn't much to make 'em happy."

While she is telling me this tragedy, I see that mother's bright eyes look a little dim, and there is a something in her voice which is like a smothered sob. But I can detect no other sign of sorrow. I indeed might fancy that she hardly felt her recent loss. However, I know better, from having in my life had some acquaintance with poor people. Any one who knows them knows how great is their endurance of the arrows of affliction, and how little they indulge in the luxury of grief. "I wouldn't wish him back, though," added a poor mother, after telling me how fever had just killed her only boy. "He's better where he is, I'm pretty sure of that, sir; and though I were main proud of him, I wouldn't wish him back."

The first halt in my travelling had been in a Court, and the next was in a Place. There was nothing very courtly in the court, or princely in the place—although they both alike bore the title of the Regent, whose memory be blest. The scene of court-life I had witnessed prepared me for one similar; but I found one poorer still.

In this royally-named quarter all the houses look alike—small square boxes of bad brickwork, a score of feet or so in height, with one room on the first floor—there seldom is a second—and one room on the ground. In the brick-box we next visited there lived in the ground room a widow with her family, and she for one-and-ninepence weekly let the top room to another widow and her family, on whom we came to call. But it is not quite so easy to make calls in the East as it is in the West. When the mistress is away, it often happens there is nobody to answer at the door. This was so when we arrived, and we were puzzled for admittance as there was neither bell, nor knocker, nor handle to the door. Presently, however, there came a little child who had been dining at the Hall, and she speedily produced the handle from its hiding-place, and gave us entrance to her home. Here was no cat, no canary, no gleam of feeble firelight to enliven the sad gloom. The bed had not been made, there was indeed no bed to make. It is true there was a bedstead and some bits of sacking on it, all huddled in a heap; but to have "made" it into a bed would have puzzled any housemaid who wished to do the work. Two chairs, a small deal table, and a sack half-filled with straw, were the only other furniture, except a broken fender; and this seemed a real luxury, for had there been a fire, it could have proved of little use. A big bundle of new sailcloth lay on the small table, which was further occupied by a hank or two of rope-yarn; so that its service as a work-table, much more than as a dinner-table, was, by these encumbrances, made present to the mind. Grandmother and mother were employed in making hammocks. Stiffish work it seemed, too, for the cloth was hard to sew. They could earn four-and-sixpence by making half-a-score, which was as much as ever one could manage in a week. The worst of it was that they lost much precious time in walking to the workshop, where they drilled the eyelet-holes, which they could not do at home.

The little girl had hastened home to get on with her "splicings." These she made with the tarred yarn, whereof her fingers bore the trace. A toughish job it was, for hands so thin and weak. Making twenty pairs for sixpence, she could earn three shillings a week. But did she never go to school? Oh yes; she had been pretty regular since Christmas, till just now.

Mother thought it mightn't matter if she kept away a bit, now work was coming in, for it had been so very slack. Home-work or school-work, which did she prefer? for it appeared that the poor child had seldom any chance of the alternative of play. Oh, she liked home-work the best, she answered rather quickly, as though there could not be a doubt. But surely it was harder? Oh yes; it certainly was harder, but then it brought in something, and mother was so poor.

A pleasant, civil-speaking, pretty, sad-eyed little maiden she appeared as she stood by me, enlightening my ignorance of the commerce of the East. Thirteen on her next birthday, although seeing her small limbs I should have guessed her two years less. There was a shy smile on her lips as she corrected my mistake in supposing that she had to sleep somewhere on the floor. Oh no; grandmother and mother, they both slept on the bed, and she slept at their feet, and there were the three children, and they lay on the floor. Yes, they all three slept together on the sack down in the corner there, between the bedstead and the wall. Clearly the little woman hardly thought herself a child; she probably was nursemaid, if not housekeeper and cook. Clearly, too, the children had not grown very big, for the sack whereon they slept was barely a yard wide. But, I could not help reflecting, six to sleep in that small room, and two of the six certainly, if not three nearly, adults! Perhaps for sake of warmth overcrowding might be pardoned, if it were not hurtful to health. But here the bedroom was a workshop, and the little air there was in it must have well-nigh been exhausted before the day was done. Still, there were six to sleep in it, and but one bed for three of them, and for the other three a sack. And had they nothing for a covering? "Oh yes, sir," the little girl replied, "we have our clothes." Clothes! Poor little child! Were a bitter frost to come, her clothes would hardly give much comfort. All she wore was a thin jacket pinned together at the throat, and a scanty skirt beneath, and a crippled pair of boots; and, as far as could be seen, a pair of cotton socks were all the linen she possessed.

Had she ever had a doll? or tasted a plum-pudding? or gathered a wild primrose? or been taken to a pantomime? Many a query like to these I felt inclined to ask of this hard-working little maiden, who had answered very prettily in a soft

and gentle voice the many questions I had put. But there were her splicings to be done, and we were taking up her time, and she could ill-afford to waste the only money she possessed. To make up for the precious minutes she had lost in telling us her story, I slipped something in her hand while bidding her good-bye; and from the stare which it attracted, and the smile which quickly followed, I came to the conclusion that a coin not made of copper is not a common gift to a poor child in the East.

Here for the present I must pause, for I have filled the space assigned to me. They who would hear further of what happened in my course of Eastern travel will do me the favour to wait until next week. Before I close, however, I may correct an error which crept into my last paper. I there stated that poor workers in the East who lived by making match-boxes received a shilling a gross, providing their own paste. This may well seem labour at starvation point, but the wage is five-fold greater than the rate now current. Twopence-farthing for twelve dozen is the present market-price, including cost of paste and time consumed in making it. In fact, by daily slaving for some nine hours at a stretch a woman in a week can barely earn two shillings. I am told of one sad case where father, mother, and seven children by their collective labour manage to earn a shilling a day, and put food in their nine mouths by the profit of their work.

GEORGIE: AN ARTIST'S LOVE.

A STORY IN SIX CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

MISS MYRA THOMPSON was an artistically inclined young lady with æsthetic tastes. She was clever and—her friends added—conceited; but her mother, who (metaphorically) sat at her feet and worshipped from this respectful distance, put it differently. She said that Myra was conscious of superior intellect, and then, mother-like, defending this assertion before anyone had time to dispute it, she would add:

“And why not? A beautiful woman is not found fault with for a knowledge of her beauty! Why, if Myra felt a superiority to girls of her age, and to such frivolous amusements as lawn-tennis or waltzing—if she felt that she understood great poets with a certain penetrating clearness denied to the general run of mankind, and not always the gift of the said great poets

themselves—why,” would repeat this fond mother, “should she not feel intellectually above, if not altogether apart from, her neighbours?”

Mrs. Thompson gave utterance to these and to similar remarks while administering afternoon-tea to her friends and acquaintances in her small æsthetic drawing-room in the Bayswater district. Myra would often be absent on these occasions, copying at the National Gallery, or assisting at some debating or literary society.

She had as yet favoured the world with no printed exposition of her sentiments, but her tastes were literary—indeed, one of her ambitions, not by any means the most aspiring, was to obtain a readership.

And—to quote Mrs. Thompson again—although so young (Myra was twenty-two), her powers of criticism were marvellous.

Nobody contradicted her. The Thompsons were poor, but in their small circle of more or less commonplace people, the mother and daughter were rather looked up to and talked about.

Mrs. Thompson, a pretty, fair woman with languid, graceful movements, and with a remembrance of better days, was the more popular of the two. Women were somewhat frightened of Myra, and men were more frightened still. So, although she received a fair share of admiration from the sterner sex, no member of it had ventured—even supposing him to have had the inclination, which is doubtful, bearing in mind the wholesome dislike men have to anything approaching to superiority in their womankind—to express his admiration in the form of a proposal.

Myra looked forward to a life of single blessedness with a sufficient amount of equanimity. It is true that she was poor, and full of æsthetic dislike to poverty, but she held herself above marrying a man for the amount of the balance at his banker's, and among these commonplace nineteenth-century men, where was to be found a Crichton admirable enough to satisfy the requirements of a Miss Thompson?

He must be a most determined democrat, and at the same time refined and highly cultured; he must be by no means a lady's man, and yet full of chivalrous respect for woman; he must be intellectual, and know not conceit.

Myra at times aired very democratic opinions; she had for heroes such men as the First Consul, Victor Hugo, Gambetta, and Parnell. On one occasion, after giving

vent to ideas of almost dynamite tendency, she had left the window in disgust, because some common people were making merry in too close proximity to her artistic surroundings; it had jarred on her æsthetic sense of the fitness of things. Mrs. Thompson had been present.

She had since been less alarmed at the seditious sentiments of her Radical daughter.

It was a cold day early in November. Poor London! declared on scientific authority to be overshadowed on the brightest summer's day by a hazy blanket of smoke; it does not exact much faith in science to believe in the thickness or in the yellowness of the blanket which descends upon you, and swathes you with such mistaken kindness through the greater part of the winter months.

On the particular day I am writing about, one could go on one's way without the aid of a will-o'-the-wisp in the mortal shape of a small boy dodging erratically about you with a promiscuous torch liable to sudden extinction. There was also no particular danger of being run over by some be-fogged omnibus, or of braining oneself against the nearest lamp-post. The worst behaviour of the fog on this day was to produce a smarting sensation in the eyes, and a peculiar taste in the mouth, not to be experienced anywhere but in London. It is one of the advantages—there are several—that we have over foreigners.

Mrs. Thompson was sitting by the fire. Afternoon-tea and an opened letter were on a small table by her side. She was wrapped in a pale blue knitted shawl, but this covering failed to keep out the cold water which was, figuratively speaking, running down her back. In common with most of our delightfully-built suburban villas, it was quite possible to sit almost on the dogs of that high-art fireplace and there to suffer the extremes of heat and cold, it being only possible to scorch one side at a time.

The cosy was on the teapot; it was terra-cotta in colour, and the flowers thereon had been designed by Myra, and worked by her mother. It was keeping the tea hot for the former, who was expected home every moment from the National Gallery. Mrs. Thompson was rather restlessly awaiting her daughter's arrival. That foreign-looking letter lying by the untouched tea will be the subject of discussion, of possible dissension between them, and she wished it were over.

In every household under the sun, I believe, there is some particular he or she, who, by force of superior strength of mind, or of will, or of intellect, or sometimes by mere selfishness or bad temper, takes as it were the first place, whose opinion is the one which carries with it the most weight, and whose wishes are the only ones which decide.

In that little household of two, Myra, from the time she could walk, and even before this interesting period, had occupied this happy position.

Mrs. Thompson poked the fire somewhat nervously—a poker is a resource not confined to Englishmen of the lower classes who have provoking wives—she had heard the opening of the little iron gate which enclosed the small make-believe of a garden, and then the sharp, decided click of the latchkey. She rang the bell; the result of which proceeding was that Miss Myra Thompson and Ruth, the maid-of-all-work, appeared on the threshold simultaneously.

"Bring up some hot buttered-toast, Ruth, nice and hot, just as Miss Myra likes it."

Ruth vanished from the scene with a not too well pleased expression of countenance, and Miss Myra came up to the fire.

She knew already that something was the matter, and that the hot buttered-toast was to be administered in the way of consolation, or, if matters were not so bad as to need consolation, at any rate for soothing purposes.

"What is it, mother? Money? Has Mr. Green written?"

Mr. Green was Mrs. Thompson's lawyer.

The girl spoke a little wearily; it was such an old story—that want of money. She was standing straight and tall, looking into the fire and pulling off her gloves. She was five feet seven, but did not look her height. Nature had given her absolutely perfect proportions—one of the rarest of her gifts, by the way; so rare, indeed, that it takes some amount of artistic training to be able to appreciate it.

Her features were short and finely cut, and she wore her thick dark hair short to her head like a boy; it was soft and curly, and made a becoming frame to the handsome, somewhat peculiar style of face; her eyes were black and a little hard-looking. Her hat was of black velvet, large, home-made, and picturesque.

She was decidedly a striking-looking girl, too much so, one would have thought, to have gone about London alone; but she

had never met with any greater annoyance than now and then a little persistent staring—a penalty that every good-looking woman has to pay. As a rule, they soon get accustomed to it, and submit to it with the proverbial sweetness of their sex.

"No, it is not money—money has nothing to do with it, or at least not in the way you think."

The toast had come up; Myra had taken off her hat and had made herself comfortable.

"If money has anything to do with it, it can't be anything pleasant," said the girl with her twenty years' experience of never having had quite enough to make both ends meet comfortably.

"Do you remember hearing me talk of my old schoolfellow, Katie Milne, who made such a good match, and then was left a widow?"

"Yes," said Myra after a moment's reflection. "Was she not dreadfully silly? drove her husband out of his mind almost—hastened his death, anyway?"

This was not a promising beginning, especially as Mrs. Thompson had to admit the truth of this somewhat uncomplimentary sketch of her old companion.

"Well," she continued desperately, "this letter is from her, and——. But perhaps you had better read it."

"Oh no, please," cried Myra, catching sight of the thin, closely-written sheets. "Surely it is not necessary to wade through all that. Do condense the unpleasantness, whatever it may be, and let us have it over."

"I am afraid you will think it rather a nuisance," said Mrs. Thompson, still weakly beating about the bush. "I know you don't like people in the house, but it's so romantic meeting her old lover again, and then being obliged to go out to Australia, and all——"

"Mother, mother," interrupted the girl, "who is going to Australia? And if they are going to Australia, why do you say I shall not like them to come here?"

"It is her little girl, but she is grown-up now;" and then Mrs. Thompson endeavoured to be more lucid and to explain how Mrs. Rickards had lately been pardoned by her cousin, Harold Sparkes, whom she had jilted years ago to marry the now defunct Mr. Rickards, a rich tea-broker, and how that this same Harold Sparkes was in an advanced stage of consumption—not brought on by his cousin's cruelty, for he had been engaged on and

off continually since then—that in spite of this the wedding was to take place immediately, and the honeymoon, by the doctor's advice, was to be spent in a sailing trip to Australia. The only impediment to all these delightful arrangements was the existence of a little daughter of seventeen, who had been knocking about with her still young widowed mother on the Continent from the age of five, when her father had died; but whose absence at any rate for those six months of honeymoon was more to be desired than her presence.

"And so," finished Mrs. Thompson, "Kate proposes that she, her daughter, should come to us until the spring. She offers one hundred pounds a year."

"This is the first time for years that Mrs. Rickards has taken the slightest notice of you, is it not?" asked Myra coldly; and then, after a short uncomfortable silence: "I suppose you would like to have this girl, would you not?"

"It would be a kindness, and the terms are liberal," replied her mother; "indeed, Kate has made so sure of my consent that she has enclosed the first quarter in advance. But, Myra, if you dislike the idea too much I will not make you utterly miserable. I can refuse, of course."

But this was said rather faintly, and indeed, truth to tell, Mrs. Thompson was already looking forward to many small luxuries to be procured by means of that unexpected twenty-five pounds.

"It will not make me utterly miserable, although I do dislike the idea of a third person in our small house," answered the girl with her usual candour. "I dislike also the idea of giving up my studio, as of course I must."

Mrs. Thompson eagerly protested against this being a necessity, proposing first that Miss Rickards should be put in a small attic at the top of the house—next to Ruth, and then that she—Mrs. Thompson—should give up her own room to the new comer, and go upstairs herself.

But Myra's common-sense and unselfishness won the day, and the studio, scarcely ever used in the winter on account of the extra fire this would entail, was to be converted into a bedroom forthwith.

"What is her name, and when is she coming?" asked the girl as she gathered up her things preparatory to going to her room.

"Georgie—Georgie Rickards. She will be at Victoria at a little after ten on Saturday morning."

CHAPTER II.

MYRA was standing by her easel, sufficiently near the window to see out, and sufficiently far therefrom to remove any impression that she might possibly be so doing.

Her mother had gone to meet Miss Rickards, had been gone since a little after nine; it was then almost eleven. In all probability she had not long to wait before seeing the girl whom she could not help regarding in the light of an intruder.

"I am sure she will find it very dull after her life of Continental boarding-houses and hotels; she will want to drag us about, and I hate that sort of thing unless one can afford to do it comfortably." So Myra had spoken at the breakfast-table to her mother, and she was still thinking these thoughts as she stepped back from time to time to get a better view of the background she was finishing.

To wonder about the personal appearance of the new comer had not occurred to her. Myra was as little vain as it is possible for a good-looking woman to be, and whereas the first question with most women, when another member of their sex is on the tapis, would be, "Is she pretty?" Myra would probably speculate as to whether she were more than ordinarily stupid or commonplace.

A cab drew up; Ruth went down to fetch umbrellas and rugs; the inevitable discussion took place with the driver, and also with a gaunt, hollow-cheeked individual who had apparently bereft himself of the better half of his breath in a wild chase after Miss Rickards's numerous boxes. The cabman and this outsider began by abusing each other, and then, upon Mrs. Thompson refusing to pay a shilling more than the right fare, became amical, and abused Mrs. Thompson.

Myra stayed where she was.

Presently the door opened to admit her mother and a small, slim girl in an ulster and French-looking toque.

"Here she is," said Mrs. Thompson, rather unnecessarily, perhaps. "Georgie, this is my daughter Myra."

Georgie came up to the taller girl and greeted her in a pretty, warm, rather un-English way.

"I hope you don't mind my coming," she said; "it is very kind of you. Mamma did not know a bit what to do with me."

And then, perhaps not finding Myra very responsive, she turned to the elder lady and kissed her.

Mrs. Thompson glanced a little nervously at her daughter. She knew Myra's dislike to anything demonstrative, and then she patted the girl's soft cheek and told her not to be silly, that they were both very glad to see her—and had she not better go upstairs and make herself comfortable while Ruth got some breakfast ready for her?

Myra offered to show her the way, and the two girls left the room together.

After an absence of about five minutes Myra returned alone.

"Well?" said Mrs. Thompson, as she gave a few touches to the arrangement of the table. "Well, what do you think of her?"

"I know nothing whatever about her," answered Myra, going back to her easel.

"But her appearance?"

"Oh, she is a pretty little thing, rather childish looking; not much in her, I should say."

"She reminds me a little of what Kate used to be," said Mrs. Thompson reflectively; "but her eyes are better. Georgie's eyes are lovely—I don't know if you have remarked them—and so blue."

Mrs. Thompson came of a family of brown eyes. Her husband's had been brown, Myra's were black, and so this gentle lady's admiration for blue, grey, or even green in eyes was easily to be accounted for, and was only another proof of the love of change inherent in us all.

Myra smiled slightly, but made no direct answer. The last time Mrs. Thompson had been enthusiastic about personal beauty was over the shape of a cook's nose. The cook had ended very badly.

"I suppose Miss Rickards won't mind going away for Christmas? Did you tell her of our arrangements?" she asked presently.

"No, not yet; but I don't think Georgie is the sort of girl to mind anything."

As she spoke Georgie appeared. She looked even more childish without her hat; her golden-brown hair was floating round her small face in untidy, fluffy curls; her eyes, which had caught and kept the colour of skies unknown to England, looked out from beneath their dark lashes with a child's bright frankness. Indeed, bright was the only adjective that properly described Georgie Rickards. On reflection, however, one must admit that this implies a good deal that is pleasant.

Mrs. Thompson was conscious of the charm already. It was certain that this girl would never say anything half as clever

as were some of Myra's remarks, but then for days together Myra was wrapped in gloomy silence, or else making reflections on life and things in general, as depressing as they were unanswerable.

Myra need have been under no apprehension that Miss Rickards would object to leaving London for Christmas, for although she could even extract some little amusement from a dense yellow fog, and was childishly elated at the necessity of breakfasting by gaslight, she was equally charmed at the prospect of going out of town for a month at the beginning of December.

"I have always heard so much of an English Christmas in the country," she said gleefully, while visions of yule-logs, holly, mistletoe, and men in shooting-jackets or red coats floated before her brain.

Myra hastened to dispel any misleading notions.

"It is not to a country-house full of people that we are going. You must not expect any balls, or indeed amusement of any sort. We are just going into lodgings, that is all."

"You see, dear," explained Mrs. Thompson in a slightly deprecatory tone, for she had seen the momentary falling of the girl's face, "we generally take our outing in the winter. Myra so hates the fogs, and they are always very bad about Christmas."

Georgie agreed, and fell into the plans of an early flitting to Lyme Regis with almost all her usual brightness.

However, Myra was not convinced, and she expressed her dissatisfaction to her mother after Georgie had gone up to bed.

"I am sure Georgie dislikes the idea most thoroughly, and really, mother, if we had not made all our arrangements—you see, paying what she does, she has no right to be made uncomfortable. It is a hateful business, and we could have come across no girl more unsuited to our mode of life, in every possible way."

Mrs. Thompson murmured something about Miss Rickards's sweetness of disposition.

"Yes, she is a nice little thing in her way, but it is not our way. Don't you see, mother? Can't you understand how painfully dull she will find it after the life she has been leading abroad?"

"She does not give one the impression of finding it dull," said Mrs. Thompson, but speaking not at all in the decided tone of her daughter.

"Miss Rickards will have been here a week to-morrow," was Myra's answer. "Things are still new to her; she has shopping to do, and all that sort of thing," rather contemptuously. "But Lyme Regis! where there is nothing but the beauty of the scenery and the sunsets. No, mother, depend upon it, Georgie Rickards is the sort of girl who cannot be really happy if she has not a man to flirt with. As far as I can make out, she has done nothing else since she was five years old. It is outrageous to have a girl of that kind thrust upon one! We shall all be miserable shut up in that old farmhouse together."

Poor Mrs. Thompson looked rather miserable already. Why did her clever daughter insist upon feeling things so deeply? No doubt Georgie was not averse to flirtation. No girl was about whom Mrs. Thompson knew anything, except Myra, but then Myra was a genius, and consequently an exception to all feminine rules—her feelings were too deep for mere flirtation.

The simple lady lay awake some considerable time that night, reflecting on the awfulness and intensity of Myra's capacity for loving, if ever awakened. She had always given her daughter credit for hidden feelings of a strength and profoundness that it would be perhaps as well not to investigate too closely in these shallow, pleasure-loving days.

The three ladies were seated at that sort of nondescript meal, high tea, so dear to their sex. Men as a rule energetically avoid it; they are so much more careful of their digestions than are their weaker sisters.

The tea was laid in a room whose only attraction was its view of the Lyme Regis bay; this attraction being then shut out with the aid of a green blind and red merino curtains. One perforce admired the diplomacy of little Mrs. Wright, the landlady, who always led new arrivals straight to the window, and there expatiated on the beauties of Nature.

The broad stretch of sea, the tall white cliffs, the irregular steep descent of houses, imprinted themselves on the mind, and one more easily overlooked the rickety sofa, and the chairs covered in glaring cheap cretonne, each flower thereon a separate eyesore to an artistic mind.

How Myra supported the yearly infliction of such surroundings somewhat perplexed her mother—Myra, who was known

to shudder at an undecorated piano-back, and who discoursed at length about what she called "expanses of ugliness."

Alas! this room was nothing better than an expanse of ugliness in itself. Let Miss Thompson turn her eyes where she would, there was anguish and desolation of spirit for this disciple of the beautiful, on every side.

Whether it was owing to that, or to more remote causes, on that particular evening Myra was depressed, or, in plainer words, decidedly cross. Mrs. Thompson was tired and shaken with the long omnibus journey from Axminster (Lyme Regis is still unspoilt by railway). Georgie was too hungry to do much beyond eating—between whiles she wondered a little at superior people's manner of enjoying themselves.

She admired Myra immensely, she had never seen anyone quite like her before, and was ready to give her as much hero-worship as this somewhat peculiar young lady would receive at her hands. But at the same time, she could not help wondering now and again at some of Myra's remarks and proceedings. She often wondered aloud, much to the annoyance of Miss Thompson, who often detected hidden irony in George's most innocent speeches.

Her hunger being somewhat appeased, Georgie made one of them, breaking a long silence.

"We seem to have brought the fog with us," she said cheerfully.

She addressed no one in particular, but Myra felt called upon to defend her chosen winter abode. She spoke with some severity:

"It is not a fog, as anyone but a child could see. It is a sea-mist—quite another thing. It is very healthy."

"It is rather dense to-night," said the elder lady; "but I assure you, Georgie, it is quite the exception here. The climate is charming, as even you, spoilt as you are for England, will be obliged to own; will she not, Myra?"

But Myra made no reply. She got up and went over to a somewhat smoky fire, which she gave a vicious poke. She was most thoroughly put out. She hated travelling second-class; she held omnibuses in detestation; and, like most people, even quite commonplace ones, was averse to being thwarted in her arrangements. All these things had befallen her, and in an aggravated form.

In the omnibus, smaller and narrower

than those in London she will walk any distance rather than avail herself of, she had been cramped about the limbs, and generally shaken, in company with three or four sturdy country-women, smelling of onions, and worthy of England in the unpicturesqueness of their attire. That she might have borne by shutting her eyes and letting her mind dwell on something beautiful—a picture of Burne Jones or a poem of Browning. Unfortunately, the closing of her eyes had not been so easy a matter. In spite of her most heroic efforts, her mother had allowed one of those objectionable, inartistic, onion-eating fellow-creatures to enter into a detailed account of her life, and, when that was finished, the family history of several of her neighbours.

There was something about Mrs. Thompson which inspired confidence to an almost unlimited degree in such people as cab-drivers, railway-porters, and beggars, in fact, as Myra said, in the breasts of the great unwashed at large. Miss Thompson had never been able to quite exonerate her mother from blame in the matter.

"People never come to me, mother, with histories of their lives," she had remarked more than once.

But Mrs. Thompson had only smiled, and declared it was all owing to a want of firmness in the outline of her nose.

The climax to Miss Thompson's woes was the impossibility of having for studio a small room with the only good north light in the house. The peculiar bitterness of the matter was that the person who had appropriated what she had almost come to look upon as her own, was an artist. She told herself she could have endured it better had he been a doctor, pedlar, tinker—anything but that. Mrs. Wright had been eloquent, too, in his behalf. Myra thought it vulgar to listen to the praises of an unmarried man. The landlady had enlarged on the fact of his being quite the gentleman, although he was an artist. She had even volunteered the remark that she was sure he would not be the one to hinder such a young lady as Miss Myra from anything she had set her heart on, and that—But Myra had cut her short, and begged that no word on the subject of the studio might be said to the artist.

Mrs. Wright had promised, holding out, as consolation to Myra, that the gentleman might be going any day, "only that he is that distracted and dreamy like, there's no real calculation possible."

Myra had listened in silence. She was

most thoroughly annoyed, and her annoyance was not diminished by an inward conviction that the presence of this unlooked-for lodger was, from different motives, by no means so disagreeable to her companions as to herself.

After venting her feelings to some small extent on the coals, Myra declared it would have been better not to have left London this year, and suggested staying only a week, returning to Bayswater for Christmas.

But Mrs. Thompson, who had left certain instructions at home as to the taking-up of carpets, rubbing-down of walls, etc., opposed this measure with unwonted decision.

"Besides, really, Myra, it is only for a few days. This artist, whoever he may be, is, you see, expected to leave almost at any moment. I can't see any sufficient reason for being so put out."

"Paul Rentoul," said Georgie, coming up and kneeling down in front of the fire, where, thanks to Myra, there was a small struggling flame. "Such a pretty name! I am sure he is nice, and an artist! You ought to be pleased, Myra."

"Then I am not what I ought to be," said Miss Thompson rather shortly. "Might I enquire how you come to know his name already? We have not been in the house for more than an hour."

"I saw a letter on the hall-table as I went upstairs; of course it can be for no one else."

"Rentoul!" repeated Mrs. Thompson; "and an artist! Is not that the name of Linda Watts's cousin, the one she is always talking about?"

"I dare say—yes—very likely; how excessively tiresome! We may have to be civil to him," said Myra impatiently. "And from what Linda says, I believe him to be intensely conceited. My holiday will be completely spoiled; he is sure to be sketching the very bits I want. I can see we have a most wretched month before us."

And with this gloomy, Cassandra-like utterance, Miss Thompson left the room, and was seen no more for the night.

It was three days later; the mist which had persistently covered everything as with a soft white shroud had vanished—whether it had been swallowed up by the sea to which, according to Myra, it owed its birth, or whether it had gone the way of ordinary fogs, is not for us to determine, and is, after all, of secondary importance.

There was only one thing to be done

with such a blue sky, such sunshine, such delicious, invigorating crispness in the air, and that was to make the most of it.

Myra, English born and bred, comprehended this. She came down to breakfast in all the paraphernalia of ulster, thick boots, and sketching apparatus.

"I shall make a day of it, mother, if I can have some sandwiches; it is so tiresome to have to disturb oneself for meals."

"My dear, how imprudent at this time of the year! You are certain to catch cold," and Mrs. Thompson shivered a little at the mere idea, drawing her inevitable shawl closer round her.

"I am going along the Undercliff; you know how sheltered it always is there—besides, I never catch cold. You might bring Georgie later, in time to see the sunset. We could all come home together. Where is Georgie, by the way? Not down yet?"

As she spoke, the door opened, and Georgie entered. Myra looked at her with a certain amount of artistic pleasure. She wore one of her pretty Paris dresses; it was greeny-brown in colour, and over this she had pinned a turkey-red art apron, copied from one of Miss Thompson's. Her golden-tinted hair was untidily picturesque, her blue eyes sparkling; she seemed part of the brightness of the morning. She made a pretty little apology for being late, and then taking in Myra's attire, asked:

"So you are going out sketching as well?"

"As well?" repeated Myra, but with an instinctive knowledge of what was coming.

"Yes, he has gone; I saw him from my window—I had such a good view—I leant right out. He is nice-looking, but—old."

During this speech, Georgie had put sugar in her tea, helped herself to the goodly wholesome-looking Devonshire butter, and otherwise ministered to her inner wants. She did not notice Myra's look of disgust. Mrs. Thompson did, and hastened to interpose:

"Leant right out, dear? I hope Mr. Rentoul—for of course it is he you are talking about—did not see you?"

"No, of course not," answered Georgie sweetly; "I waited until he was quite a long way off—nearly up the hill."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Myra almost tragically. "He has gone to the Undercliff!" After a pause: "Old, do you say, Georgie—is he grey?"

The younger girl laughed.

"Oh, not so old as that, but grave, a

pointed beard, uncommon-looking—about forty, I should think.”

“If he is Linda’s cousin he is not much over thirty,” said Mrs. Thompson. “I dare say you did not see him very well after all, Georgie.”

Here the matter dropped, and Myra departed with her sandwiches, but with the firm resolve to come back at once if the objectionable artist was in possession of her Undercliff.

Mrs. Thompson suggested that she and Georgie should go out and enjoy a little sea air, but Georgie begged to finish a book she was reading first, and Mrs. Thompson, never unwilling to stay by the fire, did not press the invitation.

The girl took her book to a wide low window seat, half-way up the old oak staircase.

There she curled herself up in the sunshine, and was soon lost to outer things.

The staircase at Holy Mount is the only original part that is left of what was once a fine old house. In the time of Charles the First it had belonged to the Heatherstones, an old Royalist family famed for the beauty of its women and the licentiousness of its men. Later on the last of the race had fallen at Sedgemoor, fighting for Monmouth. The old place had gradually fallen into decay and had been sold, partly rebuilt and patched up, and converted into a girls’ school. Since then it had fallen lower still. Those little white cards, with “Apartments” printed thereon, which were to be seen in conspicuous parts of the windows, announced but too plainly its degradation.

That blackened oaken staircase! What memories must it not possess of days gone by!—those days when old Sir Carver Heatherstone, and his sons after him, entertained there the beauty and the wickedness of the Court. What tales those steps might tell, of rustling silken dresses sweeping over them, of little feet in high-heeled shoes, and the clanking of sword and spur! Must they not have been the discreet witnesses of many a stolen meeting, or soft whisper, or Court intrigue? Ah, if they could but speak! But perhaps after all it is well that speech is denied them. No one takes to reverses kindly, and even those old oaken steps might say bitter, sour things we should not care to listen to.

Georgie had finished her book, and sat

idle in the sunshine. She was not thinking of the old staircase and its possible memories or regrets. If she was guilty of any distinct thought at that moment it was that it was very pleasant and warm, but that it would be still more pleasant to have some one to talk to—some one nice. Mr. Rentoul for instance! She got up, and standing on the low window-sill looked out. Up the steep white road, and across the fields, she had a view of both ways of getting to the Undercliff. There was no one in sight. Neither of the artists had apparently as yet frightened the other away.

She gave a little sigh, and then bethought her of Mrs. Thompson’s offer to go out. She could change her novel, at any rate. She wondered what the time was. Standing there in indecision, a strong and dreadful inclination came into her small head. The balustrade to that ancient staircase was broad, and shiny with the touch of many thousands of hands. How nice it would be to slide down it! Should she? There was no one to see her. She hesitated, and being a woman was naturally lost. She scrambled up, arranged her petticoats as gracefully as might be—she was off. As she reached the bottom an outer door creaked, there was the sound of voices, and a man and woman, both tall, both with portfolios, entered the inner hall.

Miss Rickards got down in hot haste, she grew red to the roots of her hair, and stood before them a miserable study of shamed consciousness.

Myra just said, “Georgie!” The tone was expressive. She then went through a form of introduction. “I have met Mr. Rentoul—I find we have many mutual friends—Miss Rickards.

Georgie bowed, but did not dare to look up and read all the disgust she was sure must be written on the artist’s face. She murmured something unintelligible, and hastened to seek refuge with Mrs. Thompson.

“What a fine old staircase it is,” remarked Mr. Rentoul, as Georgie disappeared. “I had no idea of its artistic merit until just now.”

And then he went up to his room, while Myra went to tell her mother that Mr. Rentoul was Linda’s cousin; that for a man he was not unbearably conceited, nor yet an utter fool, and that he was coming to call on Mrs. Thompson that afternoon.

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